THE RESOLUTION OF ROLE CONFLICT WITHIN THE FAMILY*

by

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In an investigation of the relation between cultural value conflict, family conflict, and the emotion adjustment of the person, I am participating with Florence R. Kluckhohn and a number of

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co-workers,[1] the concept of social role is being used to observe and analyze the details of behavior which is functional or dysfunctional for the family as a whole. The social role[2] concept is useful for this purpose because it facilitates observation of the way the individual members of the family become involved in the family as a superordinate system of behavior. It helps to describe not only the interaction of two members as they adjust to each other, but also the transactions[3] of a plurality of members as they interweave in the special type of compulsiveness or control which a going system always imposes on its members. Since the uniquely compulsive elements of the family system leave a characteristic stamp upon the personality development of the child, it is important to have a way of teasing apart the rather subtel elements of which it is composed.

In studying a group of families of emotionally disturbed children and comparing them with families in which the children are free of clinically manifest disturbance, we have found evidence of what promises to be a consistent difference between the two groups. In the first group the children inevitably become involved in a conflict or disequilibrium situation which exists between the pa-

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1) This study is supported by research grants from the National Institue of Mental Health, and The Pauline and Louis G. Cowan Foundation.

2) See, for example : **Nathan W. Ackerman,** " 'Social Role' and Total Personality, " Amer. J. Orthopeychiatry (1951) 21:1-17. **Nathan W. Ackerman and Raymond Sobel,** " Family Diagnosis : An Approach to the Pre-school Child. " Amer J. Orthopsychiatry (1950) 20:744-753. **Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales,** Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process ; Glencoe, III., The Free Press, 1955. **Otto Pollak,** Social Science and Psychotherapy for Children ; New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1952. **John P. Spiegel,** The Social Roles of Doctor and Patient in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, Psychiatry (1954) 17:369-376.

3) See the following; **Arthur F. Bentley,** " Kennetic Inquiry, " Science (1950) 112:775-783. **John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley,** Knowing and the Known; Boston, Beacon Press, 1949. **Florence R. Kluckhohn and John P. Spiegel,** Integration and Confict in Family Behavior (Report No .27): Topeka, Kansas, Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, 1954, **John P. Spiegel,** A Model for Relationships among Systems, pp. 16-36; in Howard a Unified Theory of Human eBhavior, edited by **Roy R. Grinker;** New York, Basic Boston, 1906.

rents. Most frequently neither the child nor the parents are aware of this fact, nor are they aware of the ways in which it comes about. In the second group of families, although there may be sources of tension between the parents, the children are minimally involved in them. In order to avoid excessive variability in our two sets of families, we have kept them similar with respect to ethnic, regional, and class variables. Nevertheless, the sources of tension can be related in every case to differences and incompatibilities in cultural value orientations and, as a corollary, in definitions of social role expectations. These incompatibilities have a pronounced bearing upon the object relations and unconscious psychodynamics of the transacting members of the family. However, I shall not deal here with the origin of the cultural value conflict of its direct relation to the intrapsychic process. In this paper the cultural value conflict in the family, and attention will be centered rather on the ways in which the role conflict[4] is handled.

While we were studying the ways in which parents unwittingly involve one or more children in their own conflicts, it became clear that this process, so ably reported by Adelaide Johnson and her coworkers,[5] could be described in the usual psychodynamic terms. Through identification with the unconscious wishes of the parent the child acts out the parent's unconscious emotional conflict. The actingout serves as a 'defense' for the parent, making it unne-

4) The expression role conflict has been used in two different ways. In the first, and perhaps more common usage, it refers to a situation in which ego is involved in a difficult or impossible choice between two different roles toward two different alters. No matter what decision he makes, he is in trouble with one or the other of his role partners in the situation. In the second usage, ego and alter have conflicting or incompatible notions of how to play their reciprocal roles. The conflict is not over which of several possible roles to take, but rather how to enact the role each has decided to take. It is the second definition which is used in this paper. Settlement of the terminological problem should not prove too difficult, but will have to be postponed for the present.

5) **Adelaide M. Johnson and S. A. Szurek,** " The Genesis of Antisocial Acting. Out in Children and Adults. " Psychoanalytic Quart. (1952) 21:323-343. **Adelaide M. Johnson,** " Factors in the Etiology of Fixations and Symptom Choice, " Psychoanalytic Quart. (1953) 22:475-496.

cessary for him to face his own conflicts. This vocabulary is adequate for most purposes and, besides, confers a kind of credibility upon the description because of long usage and ready acceptance in the mind of the user. Nevertheless, it left us unsatisfied. Even with the qualification of the term " unconscious, " the description sounds too planned, and too much under the control of one or more persons. A constant observer of the family—or of any other persistent group process—has a somewhat contrary impression that much of what occurs in the way of behavior is not under the control of any one person or even a set of persons, but is rather the upshot of complicated processes beyond the ken of anyone involved. Something in the group process itself takes over as a steering mechanism and brings about results which no one anticipates, or wants, whether consciously or unconsciously. Or the steering mechanism may bring about a completely unexpected pleasant effect. On the basis of numerous observations, we were struck with the fact that so often what is functional for one member of the family group may be dysfunctional for the family as a whole. The opposite also holds : What is functional for the family as a whole may have very harmful effects on one person. These phenomena take place unwittingly, not only because of the unconscious dynamics within each person, but also because of the operations of the system of relations in which the members of the the family are involved.

To describe the characteristics of a system of relations within a group accurately over a considerable span of time is no small task. The most successful attempt to do this known to us is the method of interaction process analysis devised by Parsons and Bales.[6] However, the categories of interaction used by these workers is at too high a level of abstraction for our purposes. We decided, therefore, to use their basic concepts of behavior oc-

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6) **Talcott Parsons, Robert F. Bales, and Edward A. Shils,** Working Papers in the Theory of Action; Glencoe, Ill., The Free Press, 1953; see Chap. 5.

curring within role systems of ego and alter or any number of alters, but to devise our own set of categories for observing the roles involved. Thus the basic concept used in analyzing the family as a system consists of describing the behavior of any one member in terms of his role in transaction with a role partner or partners. A role is defined as a goal-directed pattern or sequence of acts tailored by the cultural process for the transactions a person may carry out in a social group or situation. It is conceived that no role exists in isolation but is always patterned to gear in with the complementary or reciprocal role of a role partner (alter). Thus all roles have to be learned by the persons who wish to occupy them in accordance with the cultural (or subcultural) values of the society in which they exist. If that society is fairly homogeneous and well integrated, then the roles will be patterned in such a way that their complementary structure is obvious and stable.

The roles pertinent to the family as a system consist of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister. This is not an exhaustive list, and refers to the nuclear rather than the extended family. But if one compares these roles on any axis of variation, such as ethnic or class affilliation, it is apparent that they are defined differently, and their complementary structure varies according to the particular mode of family organization characteristic of that class or ethnic group. It is true that even within a class or ethnic group there is considerable variation of pattern. Nevertheless, one mode of organization tends to be typical or dominant compared to the others. For example, an American middle-class wife tends to expect her husband to treat her as an equal. She expects of her husband a good deal of independence, initiative, and planning for future success in his occupation, but in his relations with her and with the children, she expects cooperation, sharing of responsibility, and individual consideration. Reciprocally, the husband expects his wife to help in his plans for future economic and social success, notably by putting his success goals above any personal career or occupational goals of her own, and by developing the social and domestic skills suitable to his particular occupational status. There is evidence that these complementary role expectations may not

be precisely reciprocal—that is, there may be some built-in strain —but on the whole they fit with each other fairly well.

By way of comparison, it is illuminating to select some of the complementary role patterns in the lower-class family of Italian origin. Here the wife has no wish that her husband spend a great deal of time thinking or planning about occupational success. She expects her husband to work steadily and do his best to bring in enough money to satisfy the needs of the family, but she does not expect his economic or social status to change. She expects rather to have a large number of children who will soon join the husband in trying to increase the economic intake of the family, but in the meantime there is always help to be expected from relatives and friends if there is real need. On the other hand, she does expect him to spend a lot of time keeping up contacts with the extended and complicated networks of relatives and friends in order to keep the family's own position secure. At home she does not expect to be treated as an equal. Rather she expects him to make the chief decisions, relieving her of responsibility so that she can tend to the needs of the large brood of children. For his part, the husband expects submission but also a good deal of nurturant care from his wife. He wants her to be chiefly concerned with his children. Everything else is secondary. For both of them there is an accent on enjoyment and a sense of festivity in family life which is of greater importance than hard work and planning for the sake of social ambition. Again, although definite strains can be noted here and there, the roles of the family members vis-à-vis each other are characterized by a complementarity of expectations which fit each other in fairly smooth and systematic ways

THE EQUILIBRIUM-DISEQUILIBRIUM BALANCE

I hope that these all too brief examples of contrasting husband-wife role patterns illustrate how complementarity can be maintained in spite of variation in goals, values, and concrete sequences of acts within the role systems. The principle of complementarity is of the greatest significance because it is chiefly responsible for that degree of harmony and stability which occurs in

interpersonal relations. Because so many of the roles in which any one person is involved are triggered off by cultural cues in a completely complementary fashion,he tends not to be aware of them. He enacts them automatically, and all goes well. This automatic function of role systems has significance for psychological economy of effort. The person is spared the necessity of coming to decisions about most of the acts he performs because he knows his parts so well. This saves his efforts for those acts which occur in less stabilized role systems. In this way, role reciprocity confers spontaneity upon human behavior. Self-consciousness and self-guarding enter the scene along with role conflict, which sharply raises the number of decisions which have to be made with respect to any sequence of acts. As long as complementarity is maintained at high levels of equilibrium,[7] decisions are decentralized, so to speak. They are taken care of by the system of role relations rather than by the person's acting in a self-conscious manner.

However, it is a part of the human condition that high levels of equilibrium figured by precise complementarity of roles are seldom maintained for long. Sooner or later disharmony enters the picture. Complementarity fails; the role systems characterizing the interpersonal relations move toward disequilibrium. The role partners disappoint each other's expectations. The failure of complementarity feeds back into the awareness of the participants in the form of tension, anxiety or hostility, and self-consciousness. If the process continues without change, it will end in the disruption of the system. This process is so familiar and inevitable that it seems to merit no further comment. Yet it may contain some general elements which, if subjected to critical scrutiny, could throw light on family behavior. The key to its analysis would consist of a study of the conditions leading to the break-down of complementarity and to it a subsequent restoration. Although this study has not been carried as far as I would like, our current experience indicates that there are at least five causes for failure of complementarity in role

7) In this context, equilibrium does not denote a rigid, static state, but rather a balancing of process in a moving or changing state. The phrase moving equilibrium might, perhaps, be a better name.

systems within the family. I shall review them here very briefly, without the extended discussion and illustration which they deserve.

(1) Cognitive Discrepancy

One or both persons involved in the role system may not know or have sufficient familiarity with the required roles. This is especially likely to occur with respect to age roles, and therefore frequently characterizes sources of disequilibrium between parents and children. When the pattern of acts constituting the role is not clearly mastered or not cognitively mapped or internalized, complementarity can be maintained only with difficulty. Cues are misinterpreted, and misunderstanding reduces complementarity of expectations. Both participants must have a relatively hight tolerance for frustration and failure, and both must assume informally the roles of teacher and learner alternately. This alternation and reversal of roles will be discussed later in connection with the mechanisms of restoration of complementarity. In this culture cognitive discrepancy is a characteristic problem between adolescents and the adult world. It also occurs between husband and wife at various developmental crises, or with respect to any sudden, new situation. For example, the wedding and immediate postnuptial situation require much new learning of roles. So does the birth of the first child, the first severe illness, and so forth.

(2) Discrepancy of Goals

Roles are patterns of acts directed toward immediate or ultimate goals. The goal of ego, interlocking with the goal of alter, determines the motivational principle behind the person's taking of the role. Some goals serve the purpose of gratification, while others are chosen for the sake of defense. The same goal may serve either purpose, but if there is a shift in motivation, there is usually a shift in the definition of the role. For example, in one of the 'sick' families studied—a family of Italian extraction whom I shall call the Bonellis—an eleven-year-old daughter, Joanne, the middle one of three girls, repeatedly made demands upon her

father for gifts of all sorts. Her motive was originally desire for gratification, but it was mixed with a defensive need to test whether she was being rejected or not, At first the father gratified her demands intermittently and inconsistently. He have when he felt like it and at other times refused. Both giving and refusing represented satisfactions for him, and he included rewarding and at other times refused. Both giving and refusing represented satisfactions for him, and he included rewarding and withholding as legitimate goals in his conception of the father's role. However, the daughter gradually defined his withholding as confirmation of her fear of rejection and tested more intensively by increasing her demands. The father defined this as " pestering " and responded with increased withholding and disapproval, while claiaming that he was trying his best to satisfy her. This claim was not true, since he consistently rewarded Rosemarie, the older sister, more than Joanne. But now the goal of withholding had become defensive against the implied meaning of her demands—that he actuall preferred the older sister. In this complicated transaction, the defense was accomplished on the father's side through defining the daughter's motivation as coercive and assigning to her the informal role of pest, while giving himself the informal role of victim. Although a tenuous complementarity was maintained by the defensive establishment of the informal pest-victim relation, actually their goals became more and more discrepant. This discrepancy of goals was one of the chief reasons why the family brought the girl into the psychiatric clinic for treatment. The parents verbalized the failure of complementarity by characterizing the girl to our interviewers as a bad and disobedient daughter. They had tried their best to teach her " right from wrong, " but she was unable to " learn. " It is significant of the defensive problem in this family that her behavior was ascribed to a cognitive and value discrepancy—that she couldn't " learn " the correct behavior—when actually it was due to a motivational problem concerning unavowed goals.

Another source of discrepancy in goals is biologically deter-

8) Such roles are described by **Ralph Linton** in The Study of Man; New York, Appleton-Century, 1936; see Chap. 8.

mined, rather than of motivational origin. Fatigue, illness, and lack of maturation are accompanied by a restricted capacity for goal attainment. Other biological limitations, such as deficiency of intelligence, have the same effect. Such limitations produce disequilibrium when one of the role partners is unable to accommodate through a change in level of expectancy regarding goals to be attained, which he looks upon as rewards, as in the example of the parent who cannot accept the limited intelligence of his child.

(3) Allocative Discrepancy

In any particular social situation there is a question of the person's right to the role he wishes to occupy. There are four principal ways in which roles are sorted out among those who contend for them.

(a) Some roles, such as age and sex roles, are *ascribed*.[8] This means that they are universally expected and the person has practically no leeway : he is not free to decide to change his sex or age role. If a man tries to change his sex role, as in transvestitism, he is likely to invoke intense criticism. The same is true, although to a lesser extent, of age roles. The child who tries to act like an adult usually produces a critical response, and the same holds for the reverse situation.

(b) Some roles, such as occupational and certain domestic roles, have to be *achieved*. As an allocative principle, achievement involves effort, the satisfaction of prerequisites, and some form of ceremonial recognition such as licensure, contract, conferring of a diploma, appointment, and so forth. There is more leeway than in the case of ascribed roles, but strong sanctions will be invoked if an achieved role is simply taken without observing the required formalities.

(c) Some roles, in the main of an informal character, can be taken simply through *adoption*. No one has to ask permission to take an adopted role, although there may not always be approval of it. For example, the father in the Bonelli family adopted

9) Reference footnote 8.

the role of victim. He could have responded to his daughter's demands with some other role activity. He could have treated them as childish antics and laughed them off in the role of amused spectator—this was actually a tack he frequently took when his feelings were not intensely involved. By adopting the role of victim, however, he assigned her the complementary role of pest. The assignment was implicit rather than explicit. That is, it was concealed or masked, and on the whole he treated her as if she had spontaneously adopted the role of pest toward him. Thus adoption-assignment describes for role transactions what is denoted for the person by the concepts of introjection-projection. If he had been able to laugh off her demands, he would have treated her behavior as essentially playful.

(d) Playfulness is the sign of the last allocative principle, which is based on *assumption*. Assumed roles are not serious. They are taken in games or play, and are held to be at some distance from 'reality.' The child who plays mother is not really confusing herself with her mother. Thus there are no sanctions invoked for assumed roles. provided the person has emitted the culturally appropriate cue indicating the assumption of a role. The facial configuration referred to in the expression, " Smile when you say that, " is such a cue. It is obvious that assumed roles are of the greatest importance to the development and socialization of the child. But they are of equal importance to adults, not only for the sake of recreation and informality, but also as a means of escape from a disequilibrium situation. The formula, " I was only kidding, " changes an adopted or achieved role into an assumed one, and thus establishes a new type of complementarity when the old one was threatened with failure. In this connection, withholding a cue indicating whether a role is adopted or assumed is a frequently used method of concealing or masking motivation. Alter is left in the dark and does not know whether ego was serious or not.

The most common sources of allocative discrepancy leading to a failure of complementarity are, first, use of a culturally invalid or inappropriate allocative principle; second, withholding of a cue indicating the allocative principle being used; and, third, emission of a misleading cue which gives alter the impression that one allo-

cative principle is in use when in fact another one is actually present For example, in the Bonelli family, the mother was angry about the favoritism and excessive attention which the father showed toward their oldest daughter. In her eyes his behavior was largely seductive. At the same time she was ambivalent about his behavior, and unable to express the full range of her feelings. She preferred to attack him on the ground of not being a typical American Daddy. So she reproached him for showing too much favoritism and for being unfair to the other children, saying nothing about the competitive feelings toward her daughter which his behavior stimulated in her. His response was to deny anything inappropriate in his behavior toward his daughter, and to accuse his wife of being irritable and unduly apprehensive in this situation. Actually neither of them wanted to push the situation to the full extent of their feelings. There was an implicit agreement to avoid it and to substitute in its place their cooperative concern with the excessive demands and " disobedience " of the middle daughter.

An analysis of the allocative principles involved in this source of disequilibrium between the parents reveals, first, that the mother defines the father's role as invalid. In her eyes he acts like a lover to his daughter, and this is doubly inappropriate. It is not apart of his ascribed role as a father, or of his achieved role as a husband. He has no right to this role. Second, the father agrees with the mother's view of the allocative principles but denies that he has taken a lover's role. But since both the accusation and the denial are implicit—that is, they are only hinted at, not directly verbalized—it is necessary to look for the operations through which the potentially explosive aspects of this situation are avoided. This occurs by a mutually unconscious shift of the dispute to the ground of a cultural value discrepancy—the father's failure to be a typical American rather than a misguided Italian Daddy. At the same time, according to the observations of the interviewes who are studying the family, there is an ill-defined but quite intense intimacy between the father and daughter. It is hard to decide whether it is merely a playful aspect of filial attention and devotion, or whether it is something more than this. At times the daughter seems actually to take the mother's role toward the father. The cue which would distinguish whether this was an as-

sumed adopted, achieved, or ascribed role is missing. But the father's direct description of his activity—his own perception of his behavior—on being questioned is that it is merely a part of his generally ascribed role as father. He even goes so far as to deny to the interviewer that he shows any favoritism, claiming that he treats all his children alike.

Withholding allocative clues or emitting misleading cues are in part attempts to avert the full denouement of failure of complementarity with its accompanying intense disequilibrium. Insofar as they have this function, they will be discussed below in connection with that step in the restoration of equilibrium for which I shall propose the term masking. It is probably obvious that these are general processes occurring in transactions at all levels of the social system. Withholding allocative cues universally produces a masked or ambiguous situation favorable for the reading-in or projection of intentions. Emitting misleading cues is also a familiar device, whether in the hands of spies at the international level, or confidence men on home territory. Be that as it may, their connection with failure of complementarity is this : at the point at which the situation becomes unmasked, the allocative discrepancy is revealed in all its starkness. The disequilibrium is characterized by disillusionment ("You deceived me! "), protest ("You have no right to do what you did! "), alarm (" I've been robbed! "), and various similar phrasings in the vocabulary of victimization.

(4) Instrumental Discrepancy

A review of the origins of failure to maintain complementarity in role relations cannot neglect the fact that nonhuman events and objects form part of the context of all behavior. Insofar as role activities require technical instruments, equipment, furniture, props, costumes, climate, and other appropriate physical facilities (including money!), a deprivation or insufficiency of these instrumental prerequisites interferes with role transactions. The point is so obvious that it is represented in various traditional and contemporary maxims, of somewhat dubious accuracy. When equestrian skills were at a premium, instrumental discrepancy was pictured as, " For want of a nail, the shoe was lost / For want

of a shoe the horse was lost / For want of a horse, the battle was lost. . . . " Tody, in a less heroic cultural climate, one frequently hears, " There's nothing wrong with him that money won't cure!"

Despite the therapeutic oversimplification, such sentiments underscore the potential for severe frustaration inherent in instrumental discrepancy. In addition to legitimate and actual deprivation, instrumental discrepancy easily assumes displaced or sympolic functions. For example, in the Bonelli family, the father complained that he did not have the money to buy the things that his family demanded. Actually he tried desperately to earn more money by taking extra jobs in addition to his main employment. These frenzied efforts defined him as a failure in the dominant American cultural pattern of occupational and economic success, because he was unable to plan, budget, or save any money. On the other hand, this strenuous activity relieved him of the potential accusation of neglect—of not caring for his family's welfare. Yet the need to neglect underlay much of his overcompensatory striving. Unconsciously he resented having to take the role of the father, the provider, and would have preferred to compete with his children as the recipient of parental care and concern. This source of role discrepancy, however, had to be hidden from his conscious awareness, and its energy had to be partly displaced into other types of activity or passive avoidance of activity.

Unconsciously contrived instrumental deficiency admirably served this purpose. The family suffered from protean forms of equipment failure. The screens had holes ,the cellar frequently flooded ,the car broke down, the icebox was constantly in need of repair, fuses blew, pipes broke, paint peeled. In the midst of this chaos, the father gave the impression of much activity, rushing about to attend to the latest crisis ,accompanied by strident advice from his wife. Actually, he neglected repairing obvious defects until it was too late. The result of the neglect was painful to the wife, who had high standards of housekeeping. He met all criticism from her with the attitude, " What can I do ? I'm doing my best! "

From this description, it is apparent that instrumental discrepancy can be consciously or unconsciously motivated. To the

extent that this is true, it is closely related to goal discrepancy. It must be kept in mind, however, that it can occur quite fortuiously, as in the case of accidental loss or deprivation by fire, robbery, or some other external agent.

(5) Discrepancy in Cultural Value Orientations

As was said before, roles are patterned in accordance with the value orientations of a culture or subculture. In mixed marriages, in families that have moved suddenly from one culture to another as in emigration, and in families that are moving up or down the social class ladder, the possibilities of confusion or outright conflict in cultural values are very great. However, even in families not involved in such dramatic transitions, there is a possibility of discrepancy of cultural value orientations. This is especially true in the United States, because of the extreme mixture of values beneath the surface layers of apparent uniformity of the social system. In this country, cultural traditions are so various and so frequently at odds with each other that almost any person will have internalized some degree of cultural conflict.

In our project we are using the scheme of variation in cultural value orientations proposed by Florence Kluckhohn[10] to keep track of the cultural attitudes which can give rise to conflict. This has proved very useful, but it is too detailed and involved to set forth here. However, the way in which cultural value discrepancies can give rise to disequilibrium can be illustrated again in the case of the Bonelli family. The mother was born in this country of Italian-born parents. The father was born in Italy and did not come to the United States until he was eight years old. Consequently, the mother considers herself, correctly, to be more Americanized than the father. In both of them there is a great deal of conflict and confusion over the transition to the American patterns, but on any specific issue between them, she is always closer to the American

10) **Florence R. Kluckhohr,** " Dominant and Variant Value Orientations, " pp. 342-357; in Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture, edited by **Cylde Kluckholm, Henry A. Murray,** and **David M. Schneider,** New York, Knopf, 1953, See also **Florence R. Kluckhohn,** Variants in Value Orientations; Evanston, III., Row, Peterson, to be published in 1957.

middles-class cultural orientation. She would like to cook only American food, but he insists on Italian dishes. She would like to get away from the home, visit with friends, and ultimately obtain a job, but he insists that she constantly stay home and care for the children. She would like her husband to show more initiative and independence, although she has the capacity for making decisions and solving problems. He backs away from responsibility and is unable to discipline the children. She would like to plan for their own future and that of the children, but he is so occupied with present concerns that he cannot get his eyes on the future as a good American would.

These discrepancies in cultural values are associated with incompatible definitions of their roles as husband and wife, mother and father. Thus the complementarity of their role relations is always somewhat strained. The strain would be reduced the father were moving, culturally, in the direction the mother wants to go. But her activity toward him makes it impossible for him to utilize what potentials for movement he possesses, since he is continuously defined as a failure in terms of the American patterns. He defends himself by pleading incapacity, by claiming that he is "trying" as hard as he can, and by asking that she accept as culturally adequate substitutes other informal roles. One of these is the role of comedian which he plays with great skill, offering entertainment in the place of successful performance. However, his position vis-à-vis the value discrepancy is essentially destructive to his self-esteem. He takes his revenge on his wife through his seductive relations with his oldest daughter. In this way a value discrepancy, in which he is the loser, is compensated by an allocative and goal discrepancy in which he is the victor. Since these complicated transactions represent attempts to stabilize or restore equilibrium through masking and compromise, their further discussion will be postponed until I take up the discussion of these processes.

It is apparent that, in discussing the varieties of failure of complementarity in any concrete empirical focus, it is virtually impossible to avoid discussing simultaneously the efforts occurring in the system of transactions to compensate or reestablish equilibrium. Failure of complementarity is so disruptive that it is al-

most always accompanied by processes of restoration for which I would like to use the term re-equilibration. In any ongoing system of relations such as a family, then, one can observe re-equilibration occurring whenever the balance of equilibrium to disequilibrium in the state of the system moves too close to the disequilibrium pole. It seems to me that it is the empirical admixture of these three processes—that is, of equilibrium (high complementarity), disequilibnum (low complementarity) and re-equilibration—that has made the processes involved in the stabilization or healthy internal adjustment of the system so difficult to recognize.

RE-EQUILIBRATION

The restoration of equilibrium, once coomplementarity is threatened with failure, is itself an extremely complicated process. I have distinguished eleven steps in the process which I will here describe briefly. I believe these steps have a temporal order and that this order has a kind of internal logic. Unfortunately, I am unable to discern the basis of the order and must therefore leave the presentation in an excessively descriptive and ad hoc condition. The description has heuristic value ,though it will not leave the reader free of the suspicion that it is arbitrary and incomplete. I am myself dissatisfied with it, but at least it is a method of systematically noting processes in the family which are subtle and difficult to observe.

With respect to the problem of internal logic or the underlying process connecting the various categories, one thing can be said. The eleven categories fall into two groups which are basically different. The first five categories belong together, as do the last five. The sixth forms a connecting link between the two groups. The difference between the two groups is concerned with the method by which the role conflict is handled and the equilibrium restored. In the first group the resolution is effected by means of a unilateral decision. Ego resolves the discrepancy by giving in to alter, or vice versa. One or the other parties to the conflict agrees, submits, goes along with, becomes convinced, or is persuaded in some way. For this group, therefore, I would pro-

pose the term, role induction.[11] The net effect, whatever the particular step may be, is that alter is induced to take the complementary role which will restore the equilibrium with ego. Ego's role, on the other hand, does not essentially change. The techniques of induction have been dealt with in the classical tradition of rhetoric and have been given a contemporary analysis by Kenneth Burke.[12] They have also been considered in contemporary studies of propaganda devices. I am very much indebted to Burke for his detailed and illuminating studies of the relation between persuasion and discrepancy.

In the second group of categories, re-equilibration is accomplished through a change in roles of both ego and alter. Complementarity is re-established on a mutually new basis. Because of the novel solution of the conflict, I suggest for this group the term, role modification. The change in role expectations is bilateral, and the modification techniques are based on interchanges and mutual identifications of ego with alter. Although the distinction may be somewhat vague, induction techniques are founded on manipulative and instrumental procedures, while modification techniques are based on insight and communicative procedures.

Role Induction

(1) Coercing holds first place as the most universally available induction technique. It may hold its primacy either on biological or cultural grounds or both. It can be defined as the manipulation of present and future punishments. Thus it ranges from overt attack to threats of attack in the future, and from verbal com-

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11) Harry Stack Sullivan used the term induction for the process through which anxiety in the parent elicits anxiety in the child. However, Sullivan applied the word only to the transmission of anxiety, whereas in this paper it refers to a variety of interpersonal influences. A further distinction is that Sullivan regarded the process as somewhat mysterious—a unitary phenomenon, incapable of analytical penetration. For further details, see : **Harry Stack Sullivan,** The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry, edited by Helen Swick Perry and Mary Ladd Gawel, New York, Norton, 1953; pp. 53-55.

12) **Kenneth Burke,** A Rhetoric of Motives; New York, Prentice-Hall, 1950.

mands to physical force. It varies in intensity from mildly aversive manipulations to cruel and unusual torture. It owes its universality to its connection with the hostile-aggressive patterns of behavior within the person. The reverse is, of course, also true. This is to say that the hostille-aggressive behavior would have no biologically useful function if coercion did not exist as a culturally patterned mode of settling role conflicts. It exists in every family we have studied, and it is probably safe to say that it is present in every enduring social system ,no matter how much it may be veiled. If it is successful, the role conflict is settled through submission, in which ego accepts the complementary role enforced by alter. However, none of the induction techniques can guarantee success. They may all be met in one of two ways; either by a specific neutralizing technique for coercing is defying. The counterinductions may vary from retaliatory coercion to any of the other re-equilibration categories.

(2) *Coaxing* is in second place, not because it is less universal than coercing, but because it seems somewhat less readily available as an induction technique. It is probably not the best term for this category, although it specifies the basic principle involved in it. Coaxing can be defined as the manipulation of present and future rewards. Thus it includes asking, promising, pleading, begging, and tempting. Ego accedes to alter's request in order to gain alter's reward, just as in coercing ego submits in order to escape alter's punishment. The child who says, " Please ,!" by word or gesture, rewards his mother with love or compliance when she gratifies his request. In tempting, bribing, or seducing, alter's rewards are likely to be more concrete ! However, in seduction, the behavior is invaded by masking—insofar as the seducer conceals his actual motives—and consequently this is probably not a pure case.

Coaxing owes its universality—and its irresistibility—to the fact that it expresses ego's wish to gratify in alter. It epitomizes desire. In spite of its power, it is no guarantee of success in resolving role conflict. As with the other induction techniques, it can misfire if ego responds with a specific neutralizing technique or counterinduction. The specific neutralisation for coaxing is refu-

sing or withholding. All specific neutralizing techniques are essentially without affect. The affective neutrality occurs because the response is simply a technical way of meeting a persuasion. However, the neutrality may be hard to maintain, and some degree of affective response may creep into it. To the extent that this happens, the response becomes transformed into a counterinduction. For example, defying is simply a holding-out against threat and is not in itself affectively toned. But if ego feels anxiety over the success of defying as a way of warding off threat, then he is likely either to submit, or to become hostile and respond with countercoercion. Similarly, refusing is merely a way of warding off the pressure of coaxing, but if ego is anxious about its effect—for example, if he feels guilty—he may respond by coercing or postponing, or some other induction.

(3) *Evaluating* operates upon the role conflict in a somewhat more derived way than coercing and coaxing. In the usual, case it follows upon them, and therefore is likely to be a counterinduction, although this is not necessary or inevitable. In evaluating, alter responds to ego's behavior by identifying or categorizing it in a value context. Thus it includes such activities as praising, blaming, shaming, approving, and disapproving. For example, if alter tries to resolve the role conflict through coercion, ego may evaluate his behavior by saying, " Stop behaving like a fool!, " or " Quit trying to act like a little Hitler !" The stop and quit signal defiance, but ego clearly is responding as if defiance were not enough either to express the degree of affect mobilized in him or to neutralize the degree of coercion emitted by alter.

The effect of this kind of induction is based upon the manipulation of reward and punishment. It differs from coercing and coaxing in that the reward or punishment is generalized, categorized, and thus placed in a class of value judgments—either positive or negative—linked by verbal and visual imagery to the category. When ego says that alter is " acting like a fool, " he is linking alter's behavior to a class of punished or devalued activities symbolized by the figure of the fool. He establishes an identity between alter and all other fools. If alter accepts the identity, then he will define his having coerced as punishable or non-

effective and will terminate or extinquish his coercive activity. He may then substitute some other induction, such as coaxing, to resolve the role conflict. However, he may not accept the identity employed in the evaluation, and if so, he may use the specific neutralizing technique to be employed against evaluation. This is denying. For example, alter may respond to ego's evaluating by saying, " I am not behaving like a fool, and if you don't do what I've asked you to do, you'll have to suffer the consequences! " After denying, ego returns to coercing, showing the circular pattern characteristic of any protracted quarrel.

The same mechanisms hold true for positive evaluating such as praising. Of course, positive evaluating is more likely to be accepted, since it is a reward, although it may not be so interpreted, as in the case of what is held to be unwarranted flattery. The case of flattery, however, is another example of a compound induction because it is likely to be mixed with various degrees of masking. Alter is apt to perceive ego's flattering as concealing a hidden motive. Apart from masking, there are still good reasons for denying positive evaluating. Since the motive behind ego's positive evaluation is to induce alter to take the complementary role which will restore equilibrium, alter may deny in order to ward off this outcome. This certainly happens in the case of praise, encouragement, or support, when alter is resisting the induction process. A mother, attempting to encourage her reluctant son to go to school for the first time, may say, " Johnny, I'm sure you'll enjoy school. You'll have a good time, and Mommy be proud of you, just like she is of Freddy [an older brother]. " First the mother coaxes by holding out the promise of future reward (enjoyment), and then she reinforces with a positive evaluation, putting Johnny with Freddy in a class of rewarded objects (pride). Such an inducement can easily backfire. Johnny bursts into tears and says, " No ! I don't wanna go. I. won't have a good time. " (Refusal of coaxing.) " And I don't care about Freddy. I'm not like him !" (Denial of identity and of evaluation.) This leaves the discrepancy of goals about where it started, at high disequilibrium, and the mother may now try coercing or she may postpone the settlement of the conflict until Daddy comes home, or until tomorrow when Johnny's resistance may be lowered.

(4) *Masking* is another universal induction technique, more indirect than the three discussed so far. It may be defined as the withholding of correct information or the substitution of incorrect information pertinent to the settlement of the conflict. It includes such behavior as pretending, evading, censoring, distorting, lying, hoaxing, deceiving, and so on.

These words are taken from ordinary usage and are apt to have a negative connotation. However, it is not my intention to give masking—or any other induction technique—either a positive or negative value. It occurs universally in the course of organism-environment transactions, and has its biological and cultural aspects. The tiger stalking its prey is masking, as is the camouflaged bird sitting on its nest. Every culture has its patterned ways of concealing information and its criteria for determining what information may or may not be revealed, with or without distortion. In studying masking my intention is merely to determine its function for the way the system is working. I believe it is as significant to the function of the social system, large or small, as is repression to the function of the personality as a system. Repression is universal as an intrapsychic process, and it means that information available to certain components of the personality is either completely unavailable to another component or reaches it only in disguised form. Repression has a biological basis in the function of the organism, but the content of what is repressed is related to the content of what is masked in the social system. This is a point which Sullivan[18] repeatedly stressed in calling attention to the significance of interpersonal relations to the function of the personality. However, Sullivan tended to see only the negative side of masking. He noted how it produces obstacles to successful communication which the person internalizes, but he was not interested in its function for the social system itself.

Masking is so complex and so intrinsic to re-equilibrating processes in the family that it is impossible to discuss it adequately in this small compass. Little white lies and minor disguise, of motives take place so automatically that they are scarcely noti-

13) **Sullivan,** reference footnote 11; Chap. 13.

ceable. For example, displacement and substitution of roles between parent and child are ubiquitous. A child bumps himself on a chair, and the mother says, " Naughty chair !" assigning the chair a human activity and then evaluating that activity as if it were part of a coercive induction. Why does she do this ? Pain produces anger and in order to avoid the potential role conflict which my be precipitated between herself and her child, she involves the child in a make believe conflict with the chair, with herself in the role of referee. Furthermore she denies the potential negative evaluation of herself as insufficiently protective of the child, by displacing the carelessness to the chair. This preserves equilibrium between herself and the child and thus is functional for their role system. But one can ask whether what is functional for their role system may not be dysfunctional for the child's ability to test reality. She conceals the important information that pain and accidents can occur without motive and need to be endured in the inevitable process of maturation and acquisition of autonomy by the child. Thus her masking ties the child to her in a dependent relation in which she plays the role of protector. She conceals both from herself and her child information about her resentment at the growing independence of the child, which, if it were available as a message, would read, " If you're going to act so independent, you ought to be punished. But I don't want you to know that I think this, so I'll pretend that it's not your behavior I resent but the chair's. You will understand that the world is full of hostile chairs, and you need me to protect you from them. " If the child does not see through this masking, he will take the complementary dependent role which his mother desires for him.

In studying the family it is often difficult to disentangle the significance of minor masking, as in the example just discussed, from major transactions in which the masking is very dramatic. For example, in the Bonelli family both the cultural value discrepancy between the parents were masked and the role conflict displacet to the middle daughter who was explicitly defined by both parents as the major source of all their difficulties. The test of significance is to discover what happens when the induction technique is unmasked. Unmasking is the specific neutralizing

technique for masking. The role partners confront each other with what has been concealed or disguised. Where the masking has averted a major disequilibrium, unmasking can be extremely explosive. As a result of therapy with the mother, father, and middle child in this family, the mother began to displace less of her role conflict to the middle child and to pay more attention to the father's relation to the oldest daughter. The change was registered in a violent scene in which the mother openly voiced her resentment to the father, who then lost his temper and threw a lighted cigarette at her, denying all the while the truth of her accusation This unmasked the sexual situation but left the cultural discrepancy still concealed—that is, not directly stated as a source of role conflict between the parents. It is our hunch that when this conflict opens up, the violence in their feelings will be even greater.

(5)) *Postponing* many seem to fit uneasily as an induction technique since it appears to be merely a negative or passive way of dealing with role conflict. Nevertheless, it is undertaken with the expectation in both ego and alter that " in the interval he will change his mind. " The process by which the conflict is to be settled is deferred in the hope of change of attitude. Indeed, this is very likely to be successful since the intrapsychic process always tends to word toward a resolution of conflict. The implied instruction, " Think it over, " or the promise, "I'll sleep on it, " often achieves the desired effect. Most role conflicts in the family are not settled at the moment, but are deferred and taken up afresh, time and time again. From the point of view of persuasion, the question between ego and alter is, Who has the most to gain from postponing ? If ego considers that he has very little to gain, he may attempt the specific neutralizing technique when alter attempts to postpone. This is provoking. If ego is afraid of postponement, he may provoke or incite the conflict to appear in full force.

(6) *Role reversal*[14] is a transtional re-equilibration mid-

14) Like role conflict, the expression role reversal has been used in two different ways. In one usage it refers to a situation in which ego and alter permanently exchange roles. For example, a husband and

way between role induction and role modification. It can be defined in G. H. Mead's sense as the process of taking the role of alter.[15] Ego proposes that alter put himself in ego's shoes, try to see things through his eyes. Or ego initiates the reversal, hoping that alter will do the same. Ego may say, " Well, I think I'm beginning to see your point, but. . . . " Or, " It doesn't make too much sense to me, but I think I see what you mean. " Insofar as this is a nonmanipulative approach, it cannot be classified as an induction, and it therefore requires no specific neutralizing technique. On the one hand, if alter responds to role reversal with an induction, then ego may give up the attempt to reverse roles, and the whole process will revert to inductive and counterinductive maneuvers. On the other hand, the role reversal may well kick the process of re-equilibration toward role modification and a novel resolution. It is this ambivalent position that makes it impossible to classify role reversal as belonging to either group ; it is really transitional between both of them.

Whether role reversal is effective or not depends in large part on the intensity of masking procedures in the family relations. The more energy in disequilibrium is being defended by masking, the less likely is role reversal to take effect. In the Bonelli family, the interviewers seeing the parents tried repeatedly to test their ability to reverse roles with Joanne, the middle daughter. For example, the mother's interviewer would say, " Do you think Joanne is sort of feeling left out in the family? Maybe she feels she isn't getting enough attention. " To this sort of approach, the mother, for a long time, would respond with the sta-

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wife settle on an arrangement in which the husband stays home and looks after the house and children, while the wife takes a job and earns the income for the family. In the second usage, the phrase refers to a process in which ego and alter temporarily exchange roles, in action or in imagination, for the sake of gaining insight into each other's feelings and behavior. This definition has been extensively used by J. L. Moreno and his associates(to whom I am much indebted. For examples, see : **J. L. Moreno**, " The Discovery of the Spontaneous Man—With Special Emphasis on the Technique of Role Reversal, " Group Psychotherapy (1955) 8:103-129.

15) **George Herbert Mead**, Mind, Self and Society; Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1936.

tement, " But how could she ? We try so hard to treat them all the same !" The same sort of thing tended to happen with respect to Joanne's stealing. Joanne was not given an allowance or permitted to baby-sit in order to earn some money. This was always defended on the basis of the evaluative induction : Joanne steals. She's not reliable. We can't trust her, and so on. The interviewer asked how Joanne could ever learn to take responsibility if she were not given some. After a while this role reversal "took" with the mother, who started to treat Joanne as if she were not an irretrievably deviant daughter. This coincided with an intensive role reversal program between the interviewer and the mother, in which the interviewer tried continuously to understand how the mother was feeling. The double-barreled procedure moved Joanne out of the masking process in which she had been held as if in a vise. In turn this led to the unmasking of the sexual conflict between the mother and father with respect to Rosemarie, the oldest daughter.

Role Modification

(7) *Joking* is an outgrowth of role reversal. It is the first sign that role modification is in progress. The role partners, having successfully exchanged places with each other and thus having obtained some insight into each other's feelings and perceptions, are now able to achieve some distance from their previous intense involvement in the conflict. They are able to laugh at themselves and each other. The laughing proceeds in part, as Freud pointed out, from the saving of psychic energy coincident with the partial solution of the conflict. The jokes also permit the expression in sublimated form of some of the induction techniques which are about to be relinquished—such as coercing and evaluating. The joking process moves the allocative base of the transaction to a whole set of assumed roles, and thus introduces playfulness into what was previously a tense set of achieved of adopted roles. In play the role partners try on for size a series of weird or impossible solutions, out of which is gradually fabricated the substance of the possible solution.

(8) *Referal to a third party.* Role reversal and joking may

not of themselves create a role modification. They are helpful but not necessarily sufficient for this type of re-equilibration. Therefore, ego or alter, or both, may refer the conflict to a third person—perhaps another member of the family, a friend, or an organization—for help in its solution. The assumption is that the third party is less intensely involved in the conflict and has information or skills not available to ego or alter. Thus he can visualize a solution with greater ease. There are two difficulties which may arise from this re-equilibrating procedure. First, the third party chosen may steer the process back to a manipulative procedure and thereby restimulate the induction process. Secondly, and coincidental with this, the third person may form a coalition with ego against alter, or vice versa. If the third person is within the family, the attempted solution through referral frequently gets grounded on the rocks of such a coalition. This triadic situation has been studied by Simmel,[16] and more recently by Mills,[17] in artificially composed groups. However, the process involved in it needs much more extensive investigation. In the Bonelli family, third-party referral within the family always seemed to end in a coalition. At the outset the parents were allied against Joanne. As unmasking proceeded, the father and Rosemarie were revealed in a coalition against the mother. There was evidence that the youngest child and the mother were in alliance against the father. These shifting triadic relations are among the most difficult transactions to unearth and keep track of in the family. Yet they are of the greatest importance to the dynamics of role conflict and thus to the way in which the family system is organized and functions.

Referral is invoked whenever a family comes to a commu-

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16) **George Simmel,** " Quantitative Aspects of Groups, " pp. 85-177; in The Sociology of George Simmel, edited by Kurt H. Wolff Glencoe, III., The Free Press, 1950.

17) **T. M. Mills,** " Power Relations in Three-Person Groups, " pp. 428-442; in Group Dynimacis, edited by D. Cartwright and A. Zander : Evanston, III., Row, Peterson, 1953. **T. M. Mills,** " The Coalition Pattern in Three Person Groups, " Amer. Sociological Rev. (1954) 19:657-667.

nity agency for help and is inevitably associated with the role of the psychiatrist or other mental health worker. Implicitly or explicitly, the helper is asked to judge, referee, or take sides. The interviewers seeing our families are inevitably pitted against each other in a semicoalition with the particular member of the family they are seeing. This process is neutralized by our team approach in which the interviewers exchange information continuously with each other, permitting all of them to obtain a balanced view of the over-all family process. If there is delay in the colaborative interchange between interviewers, then the coalitions are apt to get out of hand. It seems a good working rule that the more information available to the person taking the role of the third party, the easier it is for him to avoid getting entangled in a coalition. As a corollary to this proposition, the more information available to the third person, the easier it is for him to help the role partners to a novel solution and to avoid a manipulated solution of the conflict.

(9) *Exploring* is the next step in role modification. Ego and test each other's capacity to establish a novel solution. This process was already initiated in the joking phase, but now it is undertaken more seriously. If a third party has been able to avoid becoming entangled in a coalition, he can be of great help in promoting exploration. To a considerable extent this describes the activity of the psychiatrist, case worker, nurse, or whoever is involved in the solution of a family problem. It is almost always accompanied by temporary relapses to an induction procedure, but once initiated, it tends to be self-steering. Ego and alter propose and reject possible solutions. This is accomplished not so much through verbal formulations as through actual behavior, although both paths toward the solution are probably necessary.

(10) *Compromising*. After a sufficient amount of exploration, ego and alter come to see that restoration of equilibrium involves some change in the goals each desired or in the values by which they were guided. Thus they must settle for somewhat different complementary roles than those with which they started. If the process of re-equilibration has involved a successful referral, the third

person takes very little part in the actual compromise solution. His role has accomplished its function when exploration moves re-equilibration to the threshold of compromise.

(1)) *Consolidating* is the last step. It is required because the compromise solution is characterized by novelty, and cognitive strain is still present. Even though ego and alter establish a compromise, they must still learn how to make it work. To put the matter somewhat differently, compromise can be defined as the adjustment and redistribution of goals. Then consolidating is associated with the adjustment and redistribution of rewards. The roles are modified through the redistribution of goals. The new roles still have to be worked through and internalized by ego and alter as they discover how to reward each other in playing the new roles.

CONCLUSION

The study of how the family functions and maintains itself as a going system is greatly facilitated by the observation of role transactions concerned with equilibrium (high complementarity of roles), disequilibrium (low complementarity of roles), and re-equilibration (restoration of complementarity). I suspect that these same processes occur in other small-scale social systems, such as a factory or a mental hospital. To what extent they can be detected in large-scale social systems, such as a total society I do not know. In a small-scale system such as the family, most of the process which can be seen by the observer is concerned with equilibrium. Complementarity of roles is high, decision-making is low, and most events take place automatically, leaving a considerable degree of spontaneity to the persons in transaction with each other. This is the routine, the way the system usually works. However, there are inevitable strains in any such system, and these give rise to disequilibrium. The strains can be analyzed in terms of the cognitive, goal, allocative, instrumental, and value structures of the roles. A strain represents a discrepancy in the expectations of any ego and alter with respect to these role structures. Thus it can be described in terms of role conflict. Strain

gives rise to anxiety because, if left unchecked it will lead to a rupture of the role relations, and thus to a disruption of the system. Without a discussion of the origin of this anxiety in the basic structure and function of the intrapsychic process, it can be said that the role conflict gives rise to defensive processes both in the person and in the family system. For the family system this reactive process can be described as an attempt to restore the complementarity of roles. The process itself can be called re-equilibration, since its effect is to restore the equilibrium which has been shattered.

Re-equilibration can be analyzed as an eleven-step process. The first five of these steps are manipulative. Ego attempts by persuasion or by some other means to get alter to comply with his expectations. If compliance is achieved and alter takes the necessary complementary role, then equilibrium is restored. For this reason, these steps are grouped together as a process called role induction. The last five steps are based on mutual insight rather than manipulation. They lead to a novel solution of the role conflict underlying the disequilibrium. These steps are grouped together in a process called role modification. The sixth step is intermediate between the two groups, since it can lead either to induction or modification.

If modification is successful, then the new solution of the role conflict sinks into the normal routine of the family. The " problem " has disappeared. In this way modification differs from induction. Induction is primarily defensive. The disequilibrium is warded off, but it is always likely to crop up again. It is an unsettled problem to the system, and the resolution of the strain is more apparent than real. In this way the role conflict becomes internalized by the members of the family and is likely to be productive either of a neurotic symptom of difficulties in interpersonal relations. In dealing with emotionally disturbed persons, whether in office practice or in a mental institution, one observes the appearance of new versions of the old, unsettled family role conflict. Therefore, it is fruitful to examine the role systems which the patient recreates in these settings to see in what way the new institutional settings may have elaborated role con-

flicts and inductive re-equilibrations—because of their own internal organization—which resemble the original strain in the family.

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